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Hanoverian Succession and the Stuarts on the BBC

Posted on [10/08/2014](#) by [John Cairns](#)

As a scholar primarily of the eighteenth century, this blogger was interested to note on 1 August 2014 that the three hundredth anniversary of the death of Queen Anne, the last Stewart (or Stuart) monarch of Britain, received some attention in the popular media. Under Anne, Scotland and England had been united as Great Britain in 1707, with the Scots Parliament having accepted the terms of the English Act of Settlement, under which the throne was settled after the death of Anne on her relative, Sophia, Electress of Hanover, granddaughter of James VI of Scotland and I of England. If traditional hereditary male primogeniture had counted, there were about 50 individuals with a better claim; but succession to the throne has never in any country been quite so simple.

In a fascinating recent BBC series, first shown in Scotland and now being broadcast throughout Britain, presumably because of the anniversary of Anne's death, Dr Clare Jackson of Cambridge has convincingly argued that the Stuarts, with their dynastic acquisition of the English throne and then their subsequent sometimes wise and sometimes foolish actions that led to the Union, "made" modern Britain. It is a compelling story well told that still resonates in modern politics. This blogger shares Dr Jackson's admiration for James VI, for which she has wrongly been taken to task by one reviewer: how often did countries, in the days when monarchs had real power, get wise, intellectual, monarchs such as James? This does not mean he always got everything correct; but James was a man of true vision. Indeed, if the medium is the message, as Marshall McLuhan so famously stated, then it is also worth reflecting, if I may be so bold, that Dr Jackson has a rather beguiling voice with an accent that is at the same time both Scots and English. This said, one has to add that this history programme is not devoted, as some are, to the cult of personality of a "media don"; the programme is about the Stuarts, not the presenter. This blogger urges all readers to watch it: it goes beyond the usual TV history series in its intelligence and sophisticated analysis, while still being accessible. The visual aspects of TV are used well, but do not overwhelm the history presented. See <http://www.clare-jackson.com>

Sophia predeceased her distant cousin. Thus, it was her son George who succeeded. One does not need to be the type of Whig historian berated by Butterfield to recognise that this was to have long-term constitutional implications in a whole variety of ways. But a new type of Empire awaited for the English and Irish, and above all, the Scots: an Empire with the consequences of which we still live – including seemingly benign ones such as the Commonwealth Games recently held in Glasgow – and which can be traced in the street names of both Edinburgh and Glasgow.

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